

5 new books to read in lockdown this week

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By Press Association Wednesday, May 13, 2020 - 10:00 AM

May 13, 2020



Be inspired by stories of strong women throughout history, learn more about why we should love bugs, and try the new tale from Man Booker longlist nominee Sophie Mackintosh.

Fiction

1. Blue Ticket by Sophie Mackintosh is published in ebook by Penguin, priced £7.99 (hardback available August). Available now



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It's strange to think that today Blue Ticket was supposed to come out here in hardback. Now it'll be released here on August 27th, but it's still out internationally today (excluding the US & Canada, whose beautiful version will be out on June 30th)! I'm a very visual writer, so it's overwhelming to see how beautiful the finished hardback is and how much it aligns to how I 'saw' it when writing - the colours, the design, even down to the secret little ticket embossed on the front. I love it so much and I wish that I was wearing this very frivolous ruffled silk dress that I bought for my launch party, drinking champagne and laughing and hugging you all tonight on the street outside @burleyfisher, under a perfect May sky, then crowding into a little basement somewhere in Dalston to dance and hug more. Hoping so much we can do that in August instead! But for now I'll be sitting in my garden in my scrappiest bikini with a BBQ on the go, feeling lucky. If you want this lovely thing to drop through your letterbox later in the summer, there's a link to pre-order in my bio. Thank you 💕💕💕💕💕💕💕💕
[#blueticket](#)

A post shared by [Sophie Mackintosh \(@sophmackintosh\)](#) on May 7, 2020 at 4:54am PDT

In Sophie Mackintosh's second novel, a paper slip allocated in a compulsory lottery determines the fate of hundreds of girls every day. White means you will become a mother; a blue ticket deals you the illusion of freedom. Dare to muddy the waters between these trajectories and you will be banished like Calla, granted a 12-hour head-start before the eerie emissaries begin their hunt. Illicitly pregnant, having gouged out her enforced birth control, she lurches north with the vague hope of crossing the border to safety, forging alliances with other women along the way. Told with ragged prose that catches the breath, Calla's journey articulates the irrepressible desires and wounds that can lie deep within, and is marked by a claustrophobia that never stops pressing in from the margins. This unsettling reimagining of the anxieties and pressures around motherhood lays bare the alienation that comes when your body is not truly yours.

8/10

(Review by Jemma Crew)

2. Heatstroke by Hazel Barkworth is published in hardback by Headline Review, priced £16.99 (ebook £7.99). Available May 28



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It is one month today until Heatstroke is launched so, when it was still sunny, I took it for a photoshoot. #heatstrokebook #debutnovel #bookcover #booksofinstagram #bookstagram #novel #novelwriting #writersofinstagram #writing #writingcommunity

A post shared by [Hazel](#) (@hazelbarkworth) on Apr 28, 2020 at 8:07am PDT

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A teenage girl goes missing in Hazel Barkworth's fascinating if sometimes flawed first novel. It is not missing 15-year-old Lily who is the centre of the story though, which is largely a journey into the frustrated and obsessive mind of teacher Rachel whose daughter Mia is one of Lily's friends. Rachel's relationship with her daughter is becoming increasingly strained during a heatwave, as Mia develops into a young woman with a mind of her own. Mia's father Tim is working away and Rachel misses her husband, envies her daughter, and longs for something she lost which was never a good fit anyway. Barkworth's characters aren't always developed enough for the reader to care about them fully – although they're never two-dimensional – and the location is unusually, but perhaps deliberately, vague. It's an interesting character study though and seems like a novel that would be worth another read.

7/10

(Review by Beverley Rouse)

3. Hex by Rebecca Dinerstein Knight is published in hardback by Bloomsbury Circus, priced £16.99 (ebook £7.96). Available May 14



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"The language of this novel is so finely tailored, so elegant yet organic, so absorbing...a beautiful, spooky spell." —@JennySlate, actress and author of Little Weirds In HEX (3/31), we meet Nell Barber, an expelled PhD candidate in biological science, is exploring the fine line between poison and antidote, working alone to set a speed record for the detoxification of poisonous plants. Her mentor, Dr. Joan Kallas, is the hero of Nell's heart. Nell frequently finds herself standing in the doorway to Joan's office despite herself, mesmerized by Joan's elegance, success, and spiritual force. Surrounded by Nell's ex, her best friend, her best friend's boyfriend, and Joan's buffoonish husband, the two scientists are tangled together at the center of a web of illicit relationships, grudges, and obsessions. All six are burdened by desire and ambition, and as they collide on the university campus, their attractions set in motion a domino effect of affairs and heartbreak. Meanwhile, Nell slowly fills her empty apartment with poisonous plants to study, and she begins to keep a series of notebooks, all dedicated to Joan. She logs her research and how she spends her days, but the notebooks ultimately become a painstaking map of love. In a dazzling and unforgettable voice, @rebeccadinerstein has written a spellbinding novel of emotional and intellectual intensity.

A post shared by [Viking Books \(@vikingbooks\)](#) on Mar 12, 2020 at 9:21am PDT

Part journal, part research log, part love note, *Hex* details the life of a listless botanist in New York through a series of notebook entries. Biological science PhD student Nell is obsessively lovesick with her university mentor Joan Kallas, and when she's suddenly expelled from Columbia, her life comes undone. The story meanders with Nell's fragile emotional state, and instead of an unravelling plot thread, *Hex* offers a snapshot into the tangled lives of Nell, her friends, and Joan; each character fully realised and emphatically flawed. Despite its toxic undertones, the promise of poisonous drama is disappointingly absent. Instead, language awkwardly blooms.

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Rebecca Dinerstein Knight's poetic style is at odds with Nell's bluntness. Sometimes lists of intimate details about a person or situation stretch into entire paragraphs, while at others, the prose barely skims over emotional depression. Disjointed and disconnected, the story descends into emotional darkness. Under the guise of detoxifying the relationship between poison and antidote, *Hex* is ultimately a study on human relationships and the many manifestations of love – obsessive, unrequited, lust and in marriage.

5/10

(Review by Rebecca Wilcock)

Non-fiction

4. Strong Like Her: A Celebration of Rule Breakers, History Makers, and Unstoppable Athletes by Haley Shapley is published in hardback by Gallery Books, priced £24 (ebook £15.99). Available May 14



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COMING APRIL 2020! I'm thrilled to announce that we officially have a cover for my book, Strong Like Her, which celebrates women who defied convention in pursuit of physical strength, throughout history and today. 📸 Photographed by @sophyholland and published by @gallerybooks, it promises to be a beautiful, inspirational look at the power of women. Preorder a copy at the link in my bio or wherever books are sold. 📖 #stronglikeher #stronglikeherbook

A post shared by [Haley Shapley \(@haleyshapley\)](#) on Nov 22, 2019 at 6:20am PST

Inspiring people to think, 'I want to be strong, like her', is Hayley Shapley's ultimate aim in this compilation of female strength success stories, through the ages. From the original Olympic Games in 776 BCE to modern-day CrossFit Games, Strong Like Her is a journey through the history of strong women – both in the physical sense, as well as the cultural, social and personal strength that broke gender barriers, succeeded in achieving body autonomy, and redefined social norms. Shapley illuminates the women and events that paved the way for female freedoms today, something she believes isn't just inspirational, but instructive. 24 contemporary female athletes across a range of disciplines are also showcased as "a new kind of female beauty" – one that's rooted in capability and accomplishments. In exploring the 'femininity is frailty' and 'masculinity is muscularity' dichotomy, this book proves the boundless ability of who, and what, a woman can be.

9/10

(Review by Rebecca Wilcock)

Children's book of the week

5. Do You Love Bugs? illustrated and written by Matt Robinson is published in paperback by Bloomsbury Children's Books, priced £6.99 (ebook £5.39). Available now

🐛*My first non-fiction picture book - DO YOU LOVE BUGS? - out today!! Published by the brilliant team at @bloomsburypublishing 🐛* I decided to paint my studio window (spare bedroom) to celebrate 😊 🐛 🐛 🐛 🐛 🐛 Thank you so much to the brilliant bug team at Bloomsbury pic.twitter.com/cOqkqa3vhz

— matt robertson (@drawingmatt) April 2, 2020

From the cover, you might suspect Do You Love Bugs? to be a fictional tale of a lovable bug, but instead, it's actually a packed-out non-fiction ode to why we should appreciate, and be careful around, crawlies (don't call them creepy!). Author Matt Robinson's illustrations are very sweet and silly (look out for the house fly sat on a toilet, and an ant wearing a snorkel), and the pages are busy and colourful, meaning even one page before bed should be enough to keep little brains buzzing with information. In fact, you're likely to miss facts and drawings first time around because so much is scrawled down, but it does mean you'll get multiple reads out of it, and kids can dip in and out, rather than reading it straight through, cover to cover. Sometimes you'll all want a bit more detail (why do stick insects dance side-to-side? Which jungle butterflies smell like cake?), but the whole family's interest will definitely be piqued.

7/10

(Review by Ella Walker)

BOOK CHARTS FOR THE WEEK ENDING MAY 9

AUDIOBOOKS (FICTION AND NON-FICTION)

1. Ramble Book by Adam Buxton
2. Right Behind You by Rachel Abbott
3. Becoming by Michelle Obama
4. Normal People by Sally Rooney
5. A Perfect Cornish Summer by Phillipa Ashley
6. The Rabbit Girls by Anna Ellory
7. Mythos by Stephen Fry
8. Tidelands by Philippa Gregory

9. Where the Crawdads Sing by Delia Owens

10. Albion: The Legend Of Arthur by Robert Valentine

(Compiled by Audible)

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